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Embodied Spirituality

Dagfinn Ulland

Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Education, University of Agder,
Post Box 422, NO-4604, Kristiansand, Norway
E-mail: Dagfinn.Ulland@uia.no

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Summary

The main findings on embodied spirituality within the Toronto Blessing are presented in this article. The aim of this study is to interpret ecstatic religious experiences from a psychological point of view. The theoretical framework is interdisciplinary, using theories from ego-psychology, social psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, and ritual theory. Regarding the latter notion, Thomas Csordas has developed *cultural phenomenology*, which is a culturally constructed way of understanding a situation through using bodily senses in a sort of sensory engagement that is linked with inter-subjectivity. This way of thinking assumes that the body can impart knowledge and help us understand apparently non-rational phenomena. Ecstatic phenomena can be interpreted as bodily knowledge, a *habitus*, stored or saved in the body to be later activated in a cultural and ritual context.

Keywords

embodiment, bodily knowledge, religious ecstasy, *habitus*, ritual theory, psychology of religion and spirituality

Introduction and Background

This article presents a study on ecstatic spirituality within the Toronto Blessing, which John Arnott, the senior pastor in the Toronto Airport Church Fellowship (TACF), describes as follows: “It was like an explosion. We saw people literally being knocked off their feet by the spirit of God [...] others shook and jerked. Some danced, some laughed. Some lay on the floor as if dead for hours. People cried and shouted” (Arnott, 1995, pp. 71-72). A general *aim* of the present study is to describe the initial ecstatic bodily experiences and subsequently analyze the material from a religious-psychological perspective. The

research topic is: *How should ecstatic religious experiences in a religious-psychological perspective be interpreted?*

The Toronto Blessing

The Toronto Blessing began in January 1994 in Toronto Airport Vineyard Church (TAVC), a small Vineyard congregation near Toronto Airport in Canada. People fell on the floor during intercessions, shook and laughed uncontrollably, and their bodies made strange contortions as if their stomach muscles were contracting involuntarily.

In January 1995, the congregation changed its name to the Toronto Airport Church Fellowship (TACF). John Arnott, the congregation's pastor, had on several occasions asked for intercessions so as to receive a "supernatural experience with the Holy Spirit". In June 1993, the evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne had prayed for him and more than 200 other people; while the latter fell to the ground, Arnott remained standing. In November 1993, Arnott went to Argentina where Claudio Friedzon, a Pentecostal pastor, prayed for him. Both Rodney Howard-Browne and Benny Hinn had prayed for Friedzon himself. It was in this connection that Arnott was able to take part in "The Fire". After his return from Argentina, when he heard that Randy Clark, another pastor, had been affected by this power, Clark was invited to Toronto. At a meeting on 20 January 1994, he gave testimony in front of 120 people, more than 90 of whom fell on the floor during the meeting.

Interestingly, a great deal of the attention paid to the revival in Toronto has centred on these bodily reactions, which have usually been described as being *spiritual manifestations*. Moreover, although in the beginning the TACF leadership wanted to call the revival "The Father's Blessing", the designation "The Toronto Blessing" became the most commonly used description of these unique, external bodily forms of expressions people displayed when "touched" by the revival.

People say that the ecstatic experiences within the Toronto Blessing were "like getting drunk without the hangover" and "feeling ecstasy without the need of drugs". These experiences are normally interpreted within a theological framework as evidence of the presence of God and His love.

Research Context

The Toronto Blessing can be seen as an esoteric movement that seeks to renew a forced belief in a world where most beliefs are complicated and uncertain.

The movement may thus be perceived as a kind of “retreat” from the impersonal world. According to Durkheim, it is argued that “it may have been a great gathering of effervescent enthusiasm, a refreshing experience of what neo-Pentecostalism is all about” (Hunt, Hamilton & Bunter, 1997, pp. 7-13). Others have pointed out that the Toronto Blessing represents an offer of “rest in the Spirit” and a place away from the controlled to the physical and emotional (Richter, 1995, pp. 21-25). It is claimed that the revival confirms the characteristics of the consumer society (Richter, 1996, pp. 118-120), which has been challenged on the grounds that revivals can be seen as counter-culture (Cray, 2000). It appears as an illustration of post-modern bodily spirituality (Lyon, 2000, p. 108). The Toronto Blessing focuses on physical phenomena put into a global cultural context and aided by technology (Coleman, 2000, p. 66). The term “McTorontoization” has been created, pointing out that a religious menu can be served almost anywhere on the planet (Richter, 1997, p. 114).

Against this background it is interesting to note the views of Poloma, who claims that the Pentecostal charismatic in general — and the Toronto Blessing in particular — can be described as [...] “a kind of mystical spirituality rather than a single strong religious organization” [...] (Poloma, 2003, p. 22). Her studies also show how people participating in the revival experience healing and rejuvenating powers of life (Poloma, 1998a). In one article she points out the origins and certain differences between the revivals in Azusa Street, Toronto, and Pensacola (Poloma, 1998b). In another article Poloma uses a model from McGuire’s qualitative research on healing as a framework for multivariate analysis, the effects of ritual participation, and emotional responses to four types of healing explored in a sample of 918 Toronto pilgrims (Poloma & Hoelter, 1998).

Römer’s (2002) Ph.D. thesis on the Toronto Blessing points out that it is a phenomenon born in a charismatic Christian milieu. The study examines what kind of religiosity it represents and to what degree the revival has been influenced by general temporary culture. Researchers have also been concerned with ecstatic states like the ones observed in the Toronto Blessing. An Altered State of Consciousness (ASC) means that communication with the environment has changed or been reduced (Holm, 1996, pp. 35-36). Anthropological researchers point out that such conditions — often called ASC — occur in most cultures and are not expressions of something pathological (Bourguignon, 1973, pp. 9-11). In various religious traditions, we hope to achieve ecstasy or a union with the Divine, often using techniques for meditation

(Bourguignon, 1994, pp. 306). She also refers to Ludwig, who operates with five main types of ASC (Ludwig, 1990, pp. 19-27). Ritual research has been concerned with the Toronto Blessing. Although the revival is concerned with spontaneous events taking place at the meetings, these meetings are often structured around worship and devotion as key elements. It is a combination of the charismatic and ritualistic (Robbins, 2001; Schouten, 2003).

McGuire (1988) has studied the widespread use of actions, symbols and rituals as part of the healing process, such as prayer and the laying on of hands. She is also concerned with the body as a carrier and point of knowledge that includes a body of knowledge (McGuire, 1996). These perspectives approximate the main theoretical framework used in this study: i.e., in Csordas' (1994) idea of *cultural phenomenology*, a basic approach of which is that the individual or body is subject to the culture in which it is immersed. The body is therefore not an object that should be studied separately but rather that should always be explored in its cultural and social-psychological context. Inspired by Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, in turn Csordas has constructed a synthesis of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Bourdieu's anthropology. He refers to a quotation of Bourdieu where "*habitus*" is understood as "a collection of practices defining it as a system of perduring dispositions which is the unconscious collectively inculcated principle for the generation and structuring of practices and representations" (Bourdieu, 1977/2004, p. 72). However, Csordas' focus is on the socially informed body of practice. Another important aspect in Csordas' theory is how he understands the body, which he compares with a book and the book's text with "*embodiment*". The body is a biological, material entity, while embodiment is like a text in use: "an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and by mode of presence and engagement in the world" (Csordas, 1999, p. 145). With this approach Csordas (2002, p. 246) develops what he calls *somatic modes of attention* (SMA):

My point is that the ways we attend to and with our bodies, and even the possibility of attending, are neither arbitrary nor biologically determined, but are culturally constituted [...] This suggests that neither attending to nor attending with the body can be taken for granted, but must be formulated as culturally constituted somatic modes of attention.

This theory of embodiment and somatic modes of attention has been extended and applied in the discussion. A psychological approach to religious experiences is in this context *interdisciplinary*, meaning that, in addition to using

social psychology and individual-psychological theory, we will use theory from sociology, cultural anthropology and ritual theory. This interdisciplinary approach is a recognized form of work both within the psychology of religion and sociology of religion (Bell, 1992, p. 3; Belzen, 2003, pp. 264-265; Csordas, 1999/2003, pp. 72-192; McGuire, 1990).

This study on the Toronto Blessing differs from the above-mentioned studies by using theory from the psychology of religion, cultural anthropology and ritual theory. It also focuses on cultural and contextual learning and ritual activation of embodied knowledge. The study is a summary presentation of a Ph.D. thesis (Ulland, 2007).

Methodology

In order to answer the question posed, this author has collected data through qualitative interviews, document analyses and participatory observation. The respondents (three women and four men) were recruited through different charismatic contexts in Southern Norway. They all had experienced what they called bodily manifestations in a Christian, charismatic context influenced by the Toronto Blessing. The method is a combination of empirical investigation and theoretical reflection. The documents analyzed were mostly autobiographical in nature and sold at the centre for the Toronto Blessing. The field study was done in Toronto Airport Church Fellowship and various Norwegian churches inspired by the Toronto Blessing.

The interviews took place in Norway, and the respondents were recruited from churches that had been associated with the Toronto Blessing. This contact with the revival took place both by the Norwegians visiting Toronto and by preachers from Toronto who frequently visited the Norwegian churches. Three women and four men (aged 30-45 y) were interviewed, and each interview lasted ca. 1.5 h. They were recruited by the researcher, who contacted the church leaders associated with the Toronto Blessing, asking if people were willing to be interviewed. The respondents, who belonged to the Pentecostal charismatic and charismatic Lutheran congregations, were asked about their religious background, when and where they had first heard about the Toronto Blessing, what they experienced when touched by the revival, their thoughts and feelings when they underwent any bodily reactions, their mental and physical states when they fell to the floor, and the significance for their subsequent lives and beliefs.

The interviews were transcribed and read through several times in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. The texts were then classified and categorized according to topics. The text was thereafter systematized by topic, and each category was exemplified by the respondent's statements to show meaningful variations within the category. The empirical material was then interpreted by applying psychology of religion as a theoretical frame of reference. This step in the analysis produced some challenges: the theological interpretation of the context was strong in the respondents' context and the researcher — who has a theological background himself — was able to sense this tension between the theological and social-scientific, religious-psychological interpretation of the material.

The written documents cover a wide range of autobiographical accounts from church members in Toronto describing the revival's formal leadership and the Vineyard organization itself. Since the revival began in a church that had adopted technology, its web pages and even video-presentations have been studied. A total of ten documents were used and analyzed through careful reading, and registration of common topics has been included in the overall interpretation of the material. The documents mostly describe how respondents were affected by their physical reactions and the impact this had on their subsequent lives.

Field studies were mostly completed in congregations in Toronto, Canada, and consisted of 2 weeks of intense observations during meetings that lasted from 3-4 h. This author himself completed 60 h of participant observation as well as lived with a family who was active in the church and made 2 h of calls every day for 14 days with the hostess.

Results

Field observations from the meetings in TACF combined with the interview material will now be presented, organized in accordance with the program consisting of several sequences from the beginning to the end of the meetings: i.e., the "heating sequence" (including instrumental and vocal music) as well as a prayer session followed by the ecstatic trance sequence. Finally, findings will be presented about the significance of ecstatic spirituality for the respondents.

Heating Sequence

The first phase of the meetings began with a long heating and preparation sequence in which there was a great deal of devotion, worship and surrender.

At the same time, there was strong, active physical engagement involving both a relaxed attitude and physical exhaustion, according to one of the participants (Respondent 1). Song and musical styles were varied. This exchange and diversity combined with small talk and comments made by speakers behind the podium affected the audience to such an extent that they could assume a receiving position. As Respondent 5 explained:

There was something about the atmosphere of God who was at that location in Toronto. It created a very open sky above us [...] I felt a lot of skepticism about such things, so I was really surprised that I was not more skeptical of it.

This may seem like a relatively monotonous and repetitive ritual to the researcher as an outside observer, as the singing, dancing and jumping affected people in a physical sense. Two of the participants said that they felt fatigue after taking part in this physical display. There was also an opportunity for them to demonstrate enthusiasm and worship in several forms, although at times this seemed chaotic and uncontrolled. According to one of the participants, this heating phase “melted my heart”.

Interlude Sequence of Testimony, Presentations and Sermon

The leaders’ religious statements place the experiences within a frame of reference in such a manner to legitimize the physical manifestations of TACF. Furthermore, this form of legitimacy can serve to maintain a member’s perception of reality within a religious group. The problem may be getting one’s everyday reality to relate to the experiences one has in a religious context. Dramaturgy meetings and their seductive rhythms put the participants in a mood of ecstasy. At the same time, this atmosphere creates conditions for effective interaction between leaders and participants as well as among the participants themselves. When participants experience a situation characterized by confusion and anticipation, closeness and fear, they find themselves placed in the middle of a difficult emotional “crossfire”: i.e., something is going to happen tonight, but they do not know what and how. It all gives the impression of being a divine dramaturgy characterized by being a “work in progress” or the “not-ready-aesthetics”. The sermon and other verbal elements in the meeting may (as do the presentation and testimonies) also legitimize the bodily spirituality, thereby becoming an important reference point for participants.

Intercession Sequence with Subsequent Ecstatic Experiences

The *intercession sequence* often took place at the end of the meeting. During the evening as expectation grew the crowd sensed that something special would

happen. This was expressed from the podium. It was also said that “the party could begin”, which was the leader’s indication that bodily spirituality could unfold: i.e., a number of intercessors and “catchers” were ready to pray for people who were standing along the marked lines prepared to receive a blessing. People received prayer by the touching of sensitive body parts — their heads and hearts. In addition, the participants’ hands were slowly lifted while they closed their eyes. When this occurred in a context where many people were already lying on the floor (and it was expected that one should do so), the atmosphere was loaded with expectations. For many participants, this meant that they then fell to the floor, shaking, trembling and remaining in a trance-like state.

Ecstatic Trance Sequence

In the material from field observations and interviews, an important phenomenon occurred with respect to falling and remaining in a trance-like state. As one respondent declared:

I was conscious, I heard what everyone said — there was no problem at all. But I could not bear my own body. It was just what was different [...] in the state I was in, I would be able to hear what you said, but I would not be able to communicate with you, for my heart or my thoughts were caught by something that was stronger.

Respondents spoke of a bodily spirituality that put them in a psychological state activating and triggering thoughts and feelings, the most prominent of which was an ecstatic trance. Another aspect included movements like a shaking body, flailing arms, and bending torso (which did not appear to trigger emotions to the same degree as did falling and the trance state). Respondents said that they gained access to a hitherto unknown inner landscape associated with strong emotions. One respondent related that anxiety symptoms had disappeared, another that a new and different relationship with his mother had emerged, while a third respondent spoke of increased emotional self-awareness. A fourth respondent described how the trance was like being “taken up to God”, and she saw her problems from a bird’s-eye view. Most respondents expressed positive feelings when describing what they had experienced through having their physical reactions. The physical phenomena helped them get in touch with their inner selves and emotions, resulting in a mental experience of liberation and relief. Respondents 5 and 7 compared their experiences with being intoxicated, while Respondent 2 compared them with sexual experiences.

While respondents described their cognitive states as being similar to *a trance*, none of them expressed that they were unconscious or unable to

register what happened to or around them. It was like an altered perception of time and space or an altered state of consciousness. Although they were conscious, it seemed as if their surroundings had been given a new meaning and were no longer significant in relation to the state in which they now found themselves. Additionally, while mental images arose in the minds of some respondents, they did not appear to everyone; moreover, each respondent who described such an altered state of consciousness related the experience to something religious. They met the love of God in His presence, felt that they were seen by God and loved by Him. They probably noticed that while they were slipping into their own world, their surroundings became less important; nonetheless, they did not lose their contact with reality. The respondents experienced new and unfamiliar bodily expressions that gave access to hidden information, and pent-up emotions were now illuminated. Unconscious thoughts and repressed emotions could erupt in strong emotional outbursts. The combination of their relatively free expression in song, music and dance became a gateway for emotions and provided access to their suppressed aggression and anger.

Other Phenomena

Bodily Spirituality

The data from field studies, regarding the meeting's agenda, exemplary actions, attitudes of leaders and interviews, describe a culture in which there was great acceptance of such bodily spirituality, representing a break with a spiritual culture exercising strict control over the body and a dichotomy between sacred/profane and spirit/body. The material gathered from these field observations and interviews shows that bodily expression and movement are central to the Toronto Blessing. These phenomena are, according to Respondent 3, perceived as "being pure madness":

If this had happened in a restaurant, people would have said: Get some men in white jackets and get this man brought to hospital! [...] And then people watching this would say: "Yes, this is what I thought. They are pure mad doing this".

However, such madness is accepted and defended as a sort of bodily catharsis set to catchy drum rhythms accompanied by waving banners and audio-visual effects giving it a unique overall experience. The respondents told of uncontrolled bodily movements, and Respondent 5 said it felt relaxing and good. It was as if something in the body which was tense and controlled had been shaken loose. Respondent 3 said that when his abdominal muscles started to react, the rest of

his body had to follow. These muscles had been “touched by Toronto”. Respondents 1 and 3 described their experiences as being similar to drunkenness: i.e., their bodies became heavy, and their feet could not carry them. Hands started shaking without any effort on the part of participants. Respondent 1 added that this shaking was quite troublesome because “I had to play music”. Respondents 1 and 6 talked a lot about the laughter that took control of them. As they were lying on the floor, they began to have certain visions, and everything around them seemed strange, inciting them to laughter. Respondent 1 said that she fell to the floor, curled into a fetal position and cried uncontrollably. She said that this experience initiated her reflection on her relationship with her mother. Moreover, she said that she had not been in contact with her own feelings in this way before experiencing them during the Toronto Blessing.

Ecstatic Spirituality — Importance in Life and Practice

When the respondents had the bodily experiences of shaking or falling, they usually interpreted these reactions as physical manifestations of God’s presence: i.e., God wanted to tell them something important. Respondents 4, 5 and 7 noticed a change in their lives that made them more *humble and receptive* to God’s plan for their lives.

It was such an overwhelming experience of God’s presence and God’s goodness. And for me it was quite a change in my life and my service in the manner in which to experience directly in their emotions that you are loved by God. This belief was pushed from my head down into my body and heart, and there was a new confidence in my life and service (Respondent 7).

The ecstatic experience sparked mental reflection in a number of respondents and was the beginning of a personal maturation process leading to greater self-awareness. This could be a confirmation of something they had thought of before or something that made them feel renewed. Respondents 1, 3 and 6 were also supervised during the same period and felt that their ecstatic experiences, along with the guidance and pastoral care they had received, had helped them significantly.

Interestingly, one consequence of having experienced “falling” was that participants became more receptive to claims and instructions in the same context. Respondents 3 and 5 said that, while they initially were very critical of what they saw and heard, after they had fallen to the floor they became more receptive and much of their criticism vanished. One respondent spoke of hysterical crying that is often associated with falling. While they lay on the floor, they could also be “blown away” by their seemingly uncontrollable laughter.

Two images are used to describe these emotional experiences: e.g., “...It was like being drunk” (Respondent 2), and “...it could also be compared with a sexual orgasm” (Respondent 3). Some respondents felt that this experience was an important step towards gaining better access to their own feelings: i.e., it was the beginning of a deep emotional process. In addition, the experience gave them access on an unconscious level to hidden factors: e.g., a deeper understanding of God’s love (Respondent 5), contact with one’s own feelings (Respondent 1) and the importance of less emotional control (Respondent 3). Respondents also said that this access has redeemed their religious thoughts and feelings about their relationships with God, themselves and fellow human beings. It has also led to a need for their processing of personal relationships (that in some cases can be handled through receiving spiritual guidance and in other cases through therapy).

“Meaning-making”: Change and Renewal in a Ritual Context

As for the physical manifestations of the Toronto Blessing in particular, these are viewed by the participants as external signs of the Holy Spirit’s presence: God is preparing His people for an upcoming revival.

I felt that God had seen me through the manifestations and lying at the floor. I now know that he has a plan for my life. At this time it gives me strong physical expressions and I don’t really know what it is about. But God wants something in my life, and perhaps this is used by him helping me to seek him (Respondent 1).

The manifestations can be seen as symbols representing God’s presence. This is a very important aspect of the Pentecostal charismatic worship, namely how the atmosphere of expectation and longing for an experience of God’s presence takes place at the meetings. Expectation and longing for an encounter with the Divine can in itself be regarded as a ritualized action during which one has a strong desire and hope of change and renewal. Rituals provide a framework or a license for this (habitual) renewal which is not possible in everyday life.

Discussion

Religious Facilitation through Intensive Ritual Participation

Religious facilitation can be promoted by the use of psychedelic drugs, meditation, religious language and music. Through extensive use of such instruments, an environment or a cultural context can be fertile ground for the ecstatic phenomena

(Batson, Schoenrade & Ventis, 1993, pp. 116-154). Submission to the intense physical display may be a voluntary manipulation of the body that can lead to sensory overstimulation, which as a consequence can cause trance states and ecstasy. Ecstatic dance in combination with rhythmic music may have an almost magical effect (Wulff, 1997, p. 79). Aspects of the meeting's heating and preparatory phases have been highlighted. The context described is a worship-based culture of bodily spirituality where a ritual warming creates a receiving atmosphere.

Schutz's theory of inter-subjectivity, including "shared inner time" and "mutual tuning-in relationship", can also be used to illustrate what happens in the "heating sequence" during the meetings. Song and music help both the participants and leaders to create and share in a community of mutual communication. They are "tuned-in" to each other and reside in a form of social interaction (Schutz, 1964, pp. 207-208). This can also be understood as an optimal experience or "flow" as a result of intense involvement, e.g., during a musical element in a religious ritual (Csikszentmihalyi, 1989/1991, p. 88). This form of joint participation in a religious context can evoke "collective ecstasy" or collective energy ("collective effervescence") (Durkheim, 1912/1995, p. 424). In light of the theoretical approach of inter-subjectivity, it makes sense to say that participation in an intense ritual worship-based culture results in an inter-subjective experience of shared physical phenomena. It is culturally and contextually related learning. In other words, this practice can be called a *group-based bodily spirituality* (Albrecht, 1999, pp. 194-196).

Worship and Surrender as a Sacramental Act of Love

Worship and surrender in both the "heating sequence" and subsequent "intercession action" can be perceived as both an individual and collective ritual action. Miller refers to the importance of "worship", which corresponds to a central part of the opening sequence in a meeting of the younger Pentecostal charismatic congregations (Miller, 1997, p. 13). The significance of this worship, Miller says, can be compared to a sacred or sacramental action of love in line with a mystical experience: "Worship may be viewed as a kind of sacred love making, transcending the routinized rituals that so often structure the human divine communication" (Miller, 1997, p. 87). Outer (often bodily) actions can be interpreted as an outward sign that there is something happening on an internal level. The external actions may be perceived as a sign of inner divine presence and grace. Nelson argues that the emotional service is a prerequisite for the ecstatic phenomena that will occur in meetings, and he speaks of emotional worship as collective behavior (Nelson, 2005, p. 161).

Embodied Knowledge

McGuire mentions a physical and dramatic practice of prayer and the laying on of hands which result in people falling and remaining in a dormant state. These phenomena occur in a community of ritualized prayer actions. When people are prayed for, they fall into the arms of catchers, who then lay them down on the floor (McGuire, 1988, pp. 62–65). She also claims that the body has importance as the bearer of knowledge and that it is important to have access to this knowledge (McGuire, 1990). An important question is how physical and emotional self-experience are associated with knowledge, as the latter is not only a purely mental operation. McGuire understands the body at different levels and points out that one retains a unity of “body and mind” (McGuire, 1996). Applied to this author’s material, it can be said that knowledge is communicated and learned in a cultural context in the form of bodily knowledge. The Toronto Blessing can be interpreted as a form of cultural practice in which ideas, feelings, and “sense” are literally embodied. Here it is especially important to analyze the use of symbols and rituals. In which way do they affect the participants and cause expectations and desires to be met? How do rhythms (such as ritual percussion), resonances of sound patterns of chant, dance, et cetera, shape the body/mind/self? (McGuire, 1996). To illuminate these issues further, it makes sense to use Thomas Csordas’ cultural-anthropological approach.

Csordas (2002, p. 58) is concerned with the body as a cultural entity, and not primarily as an object. He therefore uses the term “embodiment” to emphasize that the body not only deals with the physical body but also with “being-in-the world” (Csordas, 1993). According to Csordas (2002, pp. 244–246), the body is like a book, and “embodiment” is understood as its text in use. Given the fact that the body does not make sense by itself, the opinion-forming process occurs when the “book” is opened and read. This means that the body is not an object in the world but rather a subject that constantly reads the cultural context and interprets it. Through use of the term “Somatic Modes of Attention” (SMA), he wants to pick up the body’s sensory engagement in relation to other bodies. Stated another way, it is culturally determined and acquired forms of attention. The cultural learning can be stored in the body as “lived life” and become a potential for new experiences to be activated in a ritual context, as it is through such actions that the participants become aware of their bodies, the culturally learned and stored bodily knowledge thereby serving as “*habitus*” and the potential for new experiences (Csordas, 2002, pp. 144–246). This kind of embodied knowledge can be the combination of

habitus and cumulative empirical knowledge that leaders and meeting participants are experiencing through the physical phenomena.

Intercession Sequence with Subsequent Ecstatic Experiences

It makes sense to say that when there was a shift in cognitive style and structural conditions changed, there arose a condition where something new was created, corresponding with views DeMarinis has pointed out in terms of ritual “meaning-making” (DeMarinis, 1994a, pp. 12-13; 1994b, p. 16) in which she refers to Pruyser’s multidimensional reality of how religion and rituals are an important resource in the illusionistic world to create and maintain the existential and meaning-creating dimension (Pruyser 1991, p. 177). Seen from a religious-psychological point of view, this phenomenon is seen as a “ritual body technique”, which is in turn part of a cultural self-process. Csordas (1994, p. 234) says it also allows the opposite state, namely that spontaneity can be controlled and in some cases avoided, and illustrates this by describing a personal experience with the laying on of hands as follows:

I trust that anyone experimenting with this posture could have the same experience, and I trust as well that if my attention had not been occupied by proprioception — if, for example, I had been praying instead — I may well have lost my balance and fallen backward quite spontaneously into the arms of the waiting catcher.

“Holy Fainting” or “Sacred Swoon”

A trance-like state or ecstasy is often referred to as ASC. Ludwig (1990, pp. 19-27) points out five different categories or ways to “produce” ASC, the first two of which concern the reduction or increase in external stimulation and/or motor activity which occurs before ASC. The reduction of external stimulation can involve deep concentration and the indulgence in monotonous and repetitive activity. The opposite category is characterized by emotional charging, resulting in an excited mental state. Ludwig also mentions specific triggering events such as religious conversion and healing trance experiences during revival meetings. Moreover, a great deal of what is described and discussed under the sections on “heating sequence” provides evidence that the activating factors in ASC are present in this revival context. This applies not least in terms of the long song sequences and sermons of the dynamic, charismatic preachers. Ludwig calls this category *increased alertness or mental involvement*.

Respondents reported that this state of consciousness was like being in a state different than everyday life and was similar to being moved back in time

and place where life had other dimensions. One was, in a sense, present in everyday reality, but, because the reality of this presence was of a different character than the ordinary, this discrepancy affected one's understanding of time and space. Ludwig (1990, pp. 27-29) calls this feature of ASC "disturbed hour's sense", stating that the primary process thinking is dominant in ASC and the distinction between cause and effect is lost.

The Body as Instrument and Ritual Icon

Respondents told of "uncontrolled" and "involuntary" bodily movements, and field observations gave the impression of the same. Ludwig describes "loss of control" as a characteristic feature of ASC: i.e., loss of control of both the body and emotions, with the impact of involuntary bodily movements and a series of emotional outbursts in the form of laughter, shouts and tears. It may also result in "change in emotional expression", a condition where sometimes extreme emotional expression can occur (Ludwig, 1990, pp. 22-27).

Albrecht points to a certain "iconic dynamics" in Pentecostal worship, the purpose of which being to provide a "meeting with God". In order to achieve this, something is needed to replace holy pictures or icons, e.g., music, sermons, charismatic words and healing actions. God is expected to move people, and people and actions appear to be a sort of icon that can help with mediation" (Albrecht, 1999, p. 142). Falling, tumbling, and other bodily movements are expressions of this holistic, kinesthetic experience of worship. ("Kinesthetic sense" is the common name for the receptors in muscles, tendons and joints that detect the different limb position and movement (Albrecht, 1999, pp. 148-149)). The body becomes a kind of instrument for the Divine. Furthermore, the inner presence of God has an outer sign: i.e., it manifests itself in physical expression, and the body then becomes a kind of ritual icon.

The Existential Meeting — Importance in Life and Practice

Here existent psychological conditions are largely consistent with Ludwig's description of ASC. Ludwig (1990, pp. 22-27) talks about "hyper-suggestibility", which means that persons under certain conditions are impressionable. ASC also includes not only people's sense of renewal ("feelings of rejuvenation") but also changes in meaning and importance ("change in meaning and significance").

Csordas (2004, p. 169) has a concern affecting ASC conditions: i.e., he wants to describe the existential "meeting" in the ASC. What makes this meeting so important and helps it become transformational for the individual?

Csordas refers to how the theme of “otherness” is treated as a fundamental mystery and religious phenomenon. This otherness relates to topics such as holiness and grace in religions. In a state of “sacred swoon” something happens to the individual of transformative character and significance. One interpretation is to regard this as different aspects of self. The meeting with this “otherness” or “alterity” can also be interpreted as an encounter with the sacred as a religious phenomenon in which the “otherness” is given an ontological interpretation.

Csordas (2004) also introduces a concept that he links to the theory of embodiment, calling it “intimate alterity”. To further specify this term, he takes a concrete example from a study of the Catholic charismatic healing practice: “This intimate alterity appears again in the charismatic practice of resting in the Spirit, in which a person is overwhelmed by divine power/presence and falls, typically from a standing position, intonation a sacred swoon” (p. 169). There is always a hidden presence of the self due to religion, Csordas argues: “This is the origin of religion, the sacred, the holy: the intimate alterity of power as a bodily secretion, not the holy Other of abstract majesty” (p. 172). The respondents’ statements about the importance of ecstasy can be interpreted as *self-processes* in a charismatic context. In order for an individual to participate and receive healing, he must, e.g., assume the charismatic reality as being part of his “sacred self” (p. 172). The sense of the Divine Other is cultivated by participation in a coherent ritual system embedded in (and helping to continually create) a behavioral environment in which participants embody a coherent set of dispositions or *habitus*. These are the elements that constitute the webs of significance — or of embodied existence — within which the sacred self comes into being. More significantly, being healed means to inhabit the charismatic world as a sacred self (Csordas, 1994, p. 24).

The ecstatic experiences also had consequences for the respondents’ *image of God*, who was perceived to be outreaching, attentive, loving and generous (Csordas, 2004). Respondents said that they experienced being surrounded by the love of God and being seen by Him. They experienced being recognized as His useful “instruments”. Respondents said that the ecstatic experiences had a strong religious significance for them in terms of their feeling closeness to God, that He saw them and that they felt useful for Him. When Ludwig uses the term “change of self” as a characteristic of ASC, this corresponds with the religious interpretation of experience. In this context, such a change is interpreted as a transcendental or mystical experience of “unity”, “extension of self” or “oceanic feeling” (p. 172).

“Meaning-making”, Change and Renewal in a Ritual Context

Schouten (2003, pp. 25–34) describes what happens in the modern evangelical renewal movements with the terms “ritual change” and “renewal”:

New evangelic ritualistic features tend to be, for example, embodied, performed, patterned, deeply felt, sentiment-laden, ludic, ideas (not conflicting or subjected to criticism and failure) and rhythmic. New evangelical rituals are characterized by spontaneity and celebration, by experiencing God and by communion with fellow-believers, by creativity and invention, by playfulness and informality, by volatility and possibilities for immediate change.

According to Ludwig (1990, pp. 19–27) these conditions may also be perceived as a “change of meaning or significance”. While respondents spoke of visions and images, there was little evidence of hallucinations or distortions in the form of imagination or illusion. However, they had an experience that made a real impact on them (mostly as a very positive experience). Respondents repeatedly stated that it could be difficult to reproduce what they experienced, expressing a feeling of having been “close” to a mysterious experience, a feeling that cannot be expressed in words. At the same time they said that they felt renewed with a new sense of hope and new start in life, which is consistent with Ludwig’s description of ASC as something that gives a sense of renewal.

Participating in physical rituals may be a form of experiential learning that opens up to change the *habitus* and facilitates new approaches to life (Hornborg, 2005). It may lead to physical phenomena, such as falling and “holy sleep”, allowing participants to temporarily escape their everyday lives. Ritual practice could, in other words, be a suggestive action that has a creative force in itself (McGuire, 1996). DeMarinis refers to Pruyser’s theory in which people’s multidimensional reality revolves around three key words: (1) autistic, (2) realistic, and (3) illusionistic. Religion and rituals are resources for meaning-creating processes in the illusionistic world as a transitional state. Religious rituals are important in the development of people’s ability for intrapsychic and psychosocial adaptation because they are mediators of meaning and the existential dimension (DeMarinis, 1994a, p. 66; Pruyser, 1991, p. 177). Based on this theory, this author believes there are reasons to look at rituals as an existential ritualizing process of significance to the religious lives of the participants themselves. The existential and meaning-creating dimension is also highlighted by Stålhandske, who points to the sensual and emotional aspects of ritual acts. In this author’s opinion, the understanding of

meaning-creating processes expands to include more than cognition, as its sensual and emotional aspects are clearly present in the material gathered from these field studies and interviews. The change takes place where people are emotionally engaged (and not only rationally listening and reflecting) (Stålhandske, 2005, pp. 161-170). A contextual and ritual interpretation could be that worship and surrender are seen as a ritual act in a charismatic context and called a “sacramental love action” (Miller, 1997, p. 13). This kind of worship can also be called “an emotional service” (Nelson, 2005, p. 161).

Conclusions

This study shows that the Toronto Blessing has a positive view of bodily and emotional experiences and describes the ecstatic aspects as bodily spirituality. At the same time, the Revival can be described as an answer to existing needs in the religious market. The Toronto Blessing can be looked upon as an illustration of a globalized, bodily spirituality in post-modern society. Furthermore, in light of Csordas’ cultural phenomenology, cultural context and relations are of great importance for the participants in revival meetings. The cultural and contextual learning and reading of bodily spirituality through somatic modes of attention are stored as habits. This bodily knowledge or embodied spirituality can be activated in new situations, usually in a ritual context. The embodied spirituality is culturally constructed, group-based and ritual-oriented.

The ritual actions — along with the leader’s role — are of great importance for religious facilitation. During the meetings, the “heating sequence” (including the ritual actions, singing and music, bodily movements and repetitive verbal elements) prepares the participants and surrounds them with a receptive atmosphere in which the body is engaged in a somatic mode of attention. These experiences are learned and stored and can be activated in a later ritual context. The intense bodily engagement in worship and surrender can also be interpreted as sacramental actions of love to God. In the sequence of testimony, presentations and preaching, the phenomena can be accepted as plausible in the collective consciousness of believers. Laying hands on people and completing the prayer sequence are the “release-party” where the participants (through “*techniques de corps*”) gain access to stored bodily knowledge. The ecstatic phenomena can be interpreted as bodily knowledge, a *habitus*, stored or saved in the body to be activated in a cultural and ritual context. The ecstatic

phenomena may also be understood as bodily icons and external manifestations of an internal touch by God.

The *habitus* and cumulative empirical knowledge are activated. This kind of embodied spirituality represents a culture in contrast to spirituality, which wants to control the body and operates with a holy/profane and spirit/body dichotomy. In turn, the body becomes an instrument and icon in spiritual practice. In the sequence of “sacred swoon”, something like a “catharsis” and a decisive event happens. The participants experience a meaning-making process where they gain access to the depth of their lives and can also come in contact with the pre-objective.

In this way, this study is an attempt to illuminate religious-psychological perspectives on religious experiences in an interdisciplinary manner. It is meant to supplement rather than dismiss a theological interpretation. Most importantly, while the results cannot be generalized, they can nevertheless have meaning for the persons involved. Finally, this author believes that the results can be of importance in terms of interpreting individual religious experiences in various contexts such as religious groups, education and health care.

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